The Case for Promoting Partnerships Between *Academic & Student Affairs*

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Students' academic success and personal development depends not only on the quality of the curriculum and classroom instruction, but also on another major division or educational unit of the college: Student Development Services (a.k.a., Student Affairs). When instructional faculty interface and collaborate with this key student-service division, combinatorial or synergistic effects are likely to be exerted on student learning and development, thereby maximizing the impact and quality of the college experience.

Student development professionals have long been aware of the fact that the success of a college's student development program is contingent upon collaborative relations between student affairs staff and faculty (American College Personnel Association, 1975). In a seminal and highly influential text outlining future directions for the profession of student affairs, Miller & Prince (1976) categorically conclude that, "an institution's commitment to student development is directly proportional to the number of collaborative links between the student affairs staff and the faculty" (p. 155). More recently, the Joint Task Force on Student Learning—a collaborative initiative created by the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE), the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA)—has been created to promote approaches to student learning that reflect connection or integration between educational experiences occurring inside and outside the classroom. As two members of the joint task force argue, "It takes a whole college to educate a whole student. Administrative leaders can rethink the conventional organization of colleges and universities to create more inventive structures and processes that integrate academic and student affairs; [and] offer professional-development opportunities for people to cooperate across institutional boundaries" (Engelkemeyer & Brown, 1998, p.12).

More specifically, there are five currently compelling reasons why academic and student affairs' professionals need to join forces:

1. To enhance student *retention* (persistence to graduation)
2. To maximize student *learning*
3. To advance institutional *assessment, accountability, and quality*
4. To fulfill the overarching collegiate goals of *general* (*liberal) education* and *holistic development*
5. To build *campus community* by bridging the historical "persistent gap" between the administrative divisions of Academic & Student Affairs.

These five relevant reasons for forging academic/student affairs partnerships will be discussed successively in the following sections of this manuscript.

1. Enhancing Student <u>Retention</u> (Persistence to Graduation)

National research indicates that the majority of students who withdraw from college are in good academic standing at the time of their departure (Noel, 1985; Tinto, 1993), and local

(campus-specific) research indicates that non-cognitive variables better predict end-of-freshman-year academic performance than academic variables, such as SAT or ACT scores (Pickering, Calliotte, & McAuliffe, 1992; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1985). These findings strongly suggest that personal adjustment issues other than academic competency is at the root of most student attrition.

The powerful retention-promoting impact of student involvement in co-curricular activities and support services is highlighted by the conclusion reached by Pascarella and Terenzini, following their extensive and meticulous synthesis of over 2500 empirical studies on how college affects students:

> The environmental factors that maximize persistence and educational attainment include a peer culture in which students develop close on-campus friendships, participate frequently in college-sponsored activities, and perceive their college to be highly concerned about the individual student, as well as a college emphasis on supportive services. It is worth noting that some of these environmental influences on educational attainment persist even after college size and student body selectivity are taken into account (1991, p. 604).

A summary of the work of a consortium of 12 colleges formed to implement and assess practices explicitly designed to promote student retention revealed that retention strategies developed jointly, via collaborative efforts involving academic and student affairs, resulted in more comprehensive and effective retention programs than those which had been developed previously through independent efforts by these two administrative units (Stodt & Klepper, 1987).

2. Maximizing Student <u>Learning</u>

In an influential Carnegie Foundation Report, based on surveys and on-site visits of college campuses across the country, Ernest Boyer noted: “As we looked at colleges it became clear that their most powerful influence is felt outside the classroom” (Marchese, 1986, p. 7). In his final report, Boyer concluded:

> The undergraduate college should be held together by something more than plumbing, a common grievance over parking, or football rallies in the fall. What student do in dining halls, on the playing fields, and in the rathskeller late at night all combine to influence the outcome of higher education, and the challenge, in the building of community, is to extend the resources for learning on the campus and to see academic and nonacademic life as interlocked (1987, p.177).

Retrospective reports from alumni on what aspect(s) of the college experience were most influential in promoting their learning and development have consistently revealed that their most significant and memorable learning experiences occurred outside the classroom (Marchese, 1990; Murphy, 1986).

Alumni also consistently report that participation in co-curricular activities involving student leadership had the most significant impact on the development of interpersonal and leadership skills important for their career success. These alumni self-reports have been corroborated by on-

the-job managerial performance evaluations which also indicate that previous involvement in co-curricular activities, particularly those involving student leadership, is the best predictor of successful managerial performance; in fact, these experiences have been found to be more predictive of managerial success than college grades or selectivity of the college attended (American Telephone & Telegraph, 1984; Howard, 1986; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Furthermore, involvement in co-curricular leadership activity has been found to correlate positively with post-college income (Pace, 1979).

More recently, Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling conducted a review of research examining the influence of out-of-class experiences on student learning and cognitive development. On the basis of this review, they reached the following conclusion:

> Out-of-class experiences appear to be far more influential in students' academic and intellectual development than many faculty members and academic and student affairs administrators think. Even when students' precollege academic learning and cognitive ability levels and other relevant characteristics are taken into account, academic and cognitive learning are positively shaped by a wide variety of out-of-class experiences. . . . Consciousness-raising would appear to be in order. Although the politics of the process will be delicate, student affairs professionals might well consider ways in which they can constructively and collaboratively bring this body of evidence to the attention of faculty members, academic administrators, and their student affairs colleagues. The research reviewed here clearly indicates that students' out-of-class experiences—and student affairs professionals and their programs, policies, and practices—have much to contribute to students' academic, intellectual, and cognitive development (1996, pp. 157, 160).

3. Advancing Institutional <u>Assessment</u>, <u>Accountability, & Quality</u>

Unification of the professional forces of academic and student affairs is necessary in order to ensure the quality of undergraduate education because the *total effect or impact* of college encompasses both curricular and co-curricular programming, and *comprehensive outcomes assessment* embraces *both* in-class and out-of-class student experiences.

Even a cursory review of college catalogues will reveal that the majority of institutional mission statements embrace educational goals that are much broader and diverse than knowledge acquisition and cognition. In fact, the goals of higher education have been found to relate more often to psychosocial, experiential, and student-development outcomes than to strictly academic or cognitive outcomes (Kuh, Shedd, & Witt, 1987; Lenning, 1988). Strong empirical support for the contention that college impact and quality must be assessed in terms of the student's total experience, both inside and outside the classroom, is provided by Pascarella and Terenzini's comprehensive synthesis of research on how college affects students. Based on their critical review of over 2500 research studies conducted over a 20-year period, they reached the following conclusion:

> On the basis of the extensive body of evidence reviewed, one of the most inescapable and unequivocal conclusions we can make is that the impact of college is largely determined by the individual's quality of effort and level of involvement in *both academic and nonacademic* activities. Such a conclusion suggests that the impact of college is a result of the extent to

which an individual student exploits the people, programs, facilities, opportunities, and experiences that the college makes available (1991, pp. 610-611)(italics added).

4. Fulfilling the Overarching Collegiate Goals of General (Liberal) Education & Holistic Development

Historically, general education has been viewed almost exclusively as a content or curricular issue. However, reviews of the stated goals of liberal education (historically, the focus of academic affairs) and holistic development (historically, the focus of student affairs) find them to be strikingly similar (Grandy, 1988; Kuh, Shedd, & Whitt, 1987). As Berg notes, "To educate liberally, learning experiences must be offered which facilitate the maturity of the whole person and enhance development of intellectual maturity. These are the goals of student development and clearly they are consistent with the mission and goals of liberal education" (1983, p. 12).

The need to consider general education as a student development process is underscored by the results of a comprehensive, longitudinal study of students at 159 4-year colleges conducted by Astin (1991). He found that the form and content of the general education curriculum had no significant impact on a wide range of student outcomes related to general education; what did have the most significant impact on students' achievement and development were interpersonal process variables: the frequency and quality of *student-student* and *faculty-student* interaction.

More recently, Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling reported that,

> A growing body of research suggests not only that students develop holistically (i.e., change in one area of a student's growth is accompanied by changes in other aspects of that student's being) but also that the sources of influence on student development are themselves holistic. Change along any given dimension appears to be shaped by multiple and often diverse experiences or conditions (1996, p. 149).

5. Building Campus Community by Bridging the Historical "Persistent Gap" between the Administrative Divisions of Academic & Student Affairs

Over 20 years ago, Miller and Prince made what has turned out to be a prophetic statement in their influential book, *The Future of Student Affairs*: "To some extent, institutional programs have been dividing the student into parts and competing for control" (1976, p. 155). This same observation was also made and discussed extensively in four other influential books on American higher education: Ernest Boyer's *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America* (1987), the Carnegie Foundations' *Campus Life: In Search of Community* (1990), Margaret Barr & Lee Upcraft's *New Futures for Student Affairs* (1990), and *Involving Colleges* by George Kuh et al. (1991). In 1988, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators devoted a special edition of its professional periodical (*NASPA Journal*, vol. 20, no. 1) entirely to the issue of the "persistent gap" between student life and academic life in higher education. More recently, the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) published a blue-ribbon report, titled *The Student Learning Imperative*, which included the following statement as one of its major tenets:

> Student affairs professionals [should] attempt to make "seamless" what are often perceived by students to be disjointed, unconnected experiences by bridging organizational boundaries and forging collaborative partnerships with the faculty and others to enhance student learning

(1994, p. 3).

The recurrent theme in these scholarly works is that there is a schism between the curriculum and co-curriculum, marked by compartmentalization of professional responsibilities and divisive political territoriality, which has resulted in a splintering of holistic student development and liberal education into disjointed parts. These fragmented components need to be reassembled if collegiate institutions intend to promote productive partnerships and build campus community.

Students also need to experience integration of the curriculum and co-curriculum in order to maximize their development in college, and Academic and Student Affairs need each other to realize their respective educational objectives. Student Affairs needs support from the academic sector to ensure that its programs are delivered intrusively, systemically, and perennially; while Academic Affairs needs support from the Student Life sector to enhance the relevance of classroom learning and to realize the full range its stated goals for liberal education.

Building Bridges between the Curriculum & Co-Curriculum:
Strategies for Promoting Partnerships between Academic Affairs & Student Affairs/Services

Intentionally Creating a Unified Campus Culture with Shared Educational Language, Customs, & Artifacts

1. Consciously avoid *language* to describe student development programming that may have *"non-academic" connotations*.
   Examples:
   * Student *"development"* programs rather than student "activities"—which may connote the ideas of fun 'n' games
   * *"Co-curricular"* vs. "extracurricular"—which may connote a peripheral side show that's only loosely related to the institution's central educational purpose
   * Student *"Development"* Office vs. Office of Student "Affairs" or Student "Services"—the former may connote a custodial administrative/managerial function and the latter suggests a strictly "customer service" model (rather than a student learning model).

2. When advertising a student development program and co-curricular event, *intentionally articulate and communicate its educational purpose, objective, or outcome*.

3. Infuse *academic exercises into co-curricular programming* (e.g., critical thinking questions posed to students following a co-curricular experience).

4. Construct a *student development curriculum*—i.e., a co-curriculum that includes procedures, structures, and written products that *directly parallel* those found in the

   academic program.
   Sample Components:
   a) Co-Curricular *Syllabus* (paralleling the traditional course syllabus) that provides information on the co-curricular event's objectives, content, and process of educational delivery.

   b) Co-Curricular *Assessment*—for example, have students write a one-minute paper after experiencing a co-curricular program or event, which asks them to evaluate the experience in terms of how it contributed to their learning or development—particularly with respect to its intended educational outcome(s).

   c) Co-Curricular *Schedule* (paralleling the traditional schedule of classes issued each semester) that contains the titles, dates, times, and brief descriptions of co-curricular events to be offered during the semester.
   Note: This co-curricular events schedule might be attached to, or included as a separate section within the traditional schedule of classes.

   d) Co-Curricular *Catalogue* (paralleling the traditional course catalogue) that contains:
   - a mission statement for the student development program
   - educational goals and objectives
   - programs and activities
   - names and educational background of student development professionals.

   Note: This co-curricular catalogue might be incorporated within the traditional college catalogue as a special, clearly identifiable subsection.

   e) Co-Curricular or Student Development *Transcript* (paralleling the traditional registrar-issued transcript of completed courses) that formally lists and documents students' co-curricular achievements—both for personal recognition and for future student use when applying to career positions or graduate schools.

<u>Organizational/Structural</u> Strategies for Stimulating and Sustaining Partnerships

1. To ignite dialogue and stimulate collaboration, capitalize on *naturally occurring or already existing cross-divisional "intersection points"*—i.e., cross-functional areas where Academic and Student Affairs crisscross with respect to administration or education.
   Examples:
   a) new-student orientation and convocation
   b) new-student seminar ("extended" first-year orientation course)

c) academic advising (intersecting with career counseling and personal counseling)
d) practicums, internships, volunteer (service-learning) experiences
e) residential life-based academic programming (e.g., "living-learning" experiences such as tutoring or academic advising conducted in student residences)
f) student leadership development
g) senior-year/sophomore-year programming that prepares students for their transition beyond the college (e.g., career entry, transfer to a 4-year college, or post-graduate education).

2. Incorporate *courses* into the curriculum that *integrate student development issues with academic learning*.
Examples: first-year experience course; service-learning courses; senior/sophomore seminar; interdisciplinary courses with experiential components (such as a leadership development course).

3. Create *structured, current issue-centered opportunities* for fruitful interaction between Academic and Student Affairs professionals.
Example: Form *task forces, ad hoc committees, or joint research projects* to address topics of mutual interest and concern (e.g., accreditation; assessment; student retention).

4. Organize *discussion groups or "critical-moment learning teams"* of faculty and student affairs professionals *after a high-impact event or critical incident* has taken place on campus (e.g., racial incident or student suicide).

5. Make *office assignments* that intentionally place faculty members and Student Affairs professionals *within physical proximity of each other*—to increase the likelihood of dialogue, interaction, and potential collaboration.

6. Arrange for *temporary exchanges* of Academic & Student Affairs professionals who may be willing to "crossover" to another division of the college and gain new perspective (e.g., via reassigned time, internal sabbatical, or temporary positional exchange).

7. Create *campus positions* that allow administrators to *integrate* Academic & Student Affairs responsibilities (e.g., Director of the First-Year Experience; Coordinator of Student Success; Dean of Student Learning).

Faculty <u>Recruitment</u>, <u>Orientation</u>, <u>Development</u>, & <u>Reward</u> Strategies for Collaborating with Student Affairs

1. Intentionally *recruit and select* faculty members who have an interest in and commitment to student development (e.g., via position announcements, interview

questions, and hiring criteria).

2. Deliver information and opportunities for partnering with Student Affairs into *new-faculty orientation*.

3. Provide *faculty development* opportunities that prepare faculty for partnerships with Student Affairs.
   Examples:
   a) Student Development professionals make professional presentations to faculty on their "turf" (For example, devoting some faculty development programming or a piece of new-faculty orientation to provide faculty with information on student development theory and its compatibility with learning theory.
   b) Student Life professionals create a newsletter for faculty that includes information on student development research, theory and practice.

4. Weigh faculty collaboration with Student Affairs seriously in the *faculty advancement or promotion* process (e.g., as a highly desirable form faculty "service").

5. Provide faculty *awards* for contributions to student life (e.g., a "student service award" presented to a faculty member at graduation, convocation, or on "awards night").

6. Create *incentives* for faculty participation in campus initiatives that involve collaboration between Academic and Student affairs (e.g., mini-grants, travel funds, campus space).

Professional Development Strategies for Empowering Student Affairs Professionals to Collaborate with Faculty

1. Invite and reward *Student Affairs professionals to attend, and learn from faculty development events* (e.g., faculty workshops, lectures, or faculty forums).

2. Give Student Affairs professionals the opportunity to become familiar with the *professional and scholarly interests of individual faculty members*—so that they may be selectively asked to *share their expertise* on collaborative projects (e.g., research studies; grant proposals).

3. Create opportunities for Student Affairs professionals to become familiar with faculty members' *avocational interests* so that they may be *selectively recruited* for co-curricular partnerships that are interesting or appealing to them (e.g., a bicycling professor may be interested in sponsoring a student cycling club).

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